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What you should  
know about

# MARKET CATTLE TESTING

for Brucellosis

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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

What you should know about

# **MARKET CATTLE TESTING**

for Brucellosis

## **What is it?**

This is a new method for screening market cattle for brucellosis on the way to or at the packing plant. This program is designed primarily for cattlemen in range and semi-range areas, but may be used to some extent in non-range areas.

## **How does it work?**

The program consists of six basic steps:

- Cattle being sold for beef are identified with a special backtag at the ranch or at assembly points on the way to market.
- Blood samples are collected from tagged animals at the packing plant or other designated points.
- Blood samples are then forwarded to a State-Federal cooperative laboratory where brucellosis tests are conducted.
- Test results are forwarded to disease control officials in the State where cattle originated.
- Negative animals are credited to herds and areas of origin. When blood tests indicate infection is present, State and Federal animal disease officials and veterinarians work directly with the owner until the disease is eradicated.
- If you are in an area where winter feeding is practiced, at least 80 percent of all eligible heifer calves retained in your herd each year must be vaccinated.

### **Who may take part?**

Any cattlemen in a county or other designated area where the market cattle testing program is in operation. Information on the program may be obtained from your State or Federal veterinarian or from your county agent.

### **Can counties be recertified as modified-certified areas on the basis of testing market cattle?**

Yes. Counties may be recertified under this plan if herd owners test at least 5 percent of all breeding cattle in the county each year, or a total of 15 percent for each 3-year period.

### **How long does this period of recertification last?**

Areas are recertified for 3 years.

### **What cattle are tested under this plan?**

Only female cattle 3 years of age or older are back-tagged and tested. The results of these tests are credited to your herd and your area.

### **Why aren't younger cattle tested?**

Because older animals in the herd are most likely to be affected with brucellosis.



### **What is the purpose of identification tags?**

These tags, made of tough plastic material are imprinted with a combination of numbers and letters that identify the State, county, and herd of origin of animals shipped to market.

### **Where can I get these tags?**

You can get tags, and tubes of cement for applying them to animals, from your State or Federal veterinarian, or in some States from your brand inspector or county agent. In some States tags and tubes of cement are being supplied in kits, along with instructions on how they are to be used. Your local county agent can tell you where to obtain tags.

### **How and where are the tags applied to animals?**

One tag is cemented on each animal. Place it on either side, just back of the shoulder, and 4 inches below the back-line.

### **How do I report on the tags I use?**

Reporting systems will vary from one State to another. Check with State or Federal officials, or your county agent, for details on how to report





the tags you use. In all cases report your use of tags immediately to make sure you receive proper credit for the animals you have tagged and shipped.

**Can I ship tagged animals to any market I choose?**

Yes. All Federally-inspected slaughter houses—and many not under Federal inspection—are cooperating in the market cattle testing program.

**Must I take part in this program?**

No. The program is completely voluntary.

**Will all animals I tag and ship to market be blood tested?**

All tagged animals shipped to markets that are cooperating under the program will be tested and the results credited to your herd. However, reactors found more than 14 days after they leave your ranch will not be charged to your herd. When the owner requests that blood samples be taken at the ranch, animals should not be tagged. Where blood samples are gathered at auction markets, or at other assembly points, all tagged animals over 3 years of age will be tested.





**Who collects the blood samples from cattle I tag and ship to market?**

This step will vary from one State to another. Blood samples will be taken by Federal meat inspection personnel where animals are sent to Federally-inspected slaughter houses. In other participating plants, trained personnel will obtain the samples. In some States, blood samples may be taken by veterinarians at the ranch at the owner's request, or at other assembly points on the way to slaughter.

**Who makes the actual blood test?**

Actual testing will be done by qualified technicians at cooperative State-Federal laboratories.

**What percentage of herds in range and semi-range areas are likely to require further on-the-ranch blood testing?**

Field studies indicate that in beef producing areas, on-the-ranch blood testing may be required in



only about 3 herds in 100. In other words, about 97 percent of all herd owners in range and semi-range areas who backtag their cattle will not need to blood test their herds.

**If a reactor is found among the animals tested, how will it be traced?**

Numbers on the tags you use will be recorded for your herd. Since similar numbers will not be issued to any other owner, animals bearing a particular number can be traced to the State, county, and herd where they came from.

**What happens if reactors are found among the cows I ship to market?**

State and Federal veterinarians will discuss with you the information they have obtained relative to the possibility of finding further infection in your herd and review possible plans of action.

**If reactors are found among the cattle I ship to market, must I blood test my entire herd?**

This will depend upon a number of factors: length of time that has elapsed from the time animals leave your ranch until they are tested at slaughter, number of reactors found, whether or not brucellosis has previously been found in your herd, whether or not the reactors were official calfhood vaccinates, on the size of your herd, and whether or not recent additions have been made to the herd.

**If my herd is infected, what alternatives do I have?**

You may select one of the following plans:

- You may test all animals in your herd and remove reactors regardless of herd size.
- If your herd is small and contains 50 or fewer animals, all animals will be tested and reactors removed. If your herd contains more than 50 animals you may blood test a representative sample, the number depending upon herd size. (Your State or Federal veterinarian can give you the exact number to be tested based on your herd size.)

- You can choose to vaccinate all eligible calves, and blood test all cattle over 3 years of age moving from your herd for a period of four years. If no reactors are found during this period, and enough cattle have been tested to total the required representative sample, your herd will then be considered brucellosis-free. If blood tests of marketed animals reveal further infection, a complete herd blood test will be required.

**What happens if other cattlemen in my area fail to test a total of 15 percent of all cattle over a three-year period?**

Either 20 percent of the herds not participating in the market cattle testing program must be sample-tested at the ranch or sufficient additional testing of adult cows must be done in non-participating herds to make up the required 15 percent.

**What else must I—and other cattlemen in my area—do to qualify for recertification under this plan?**

At least 80 percent of the eligible heifer calves retained in your area each year must be vaccinated. Vaccination is not required in strictly range areas where winter feeding is not practiced. However, a high level of calf vaccination is recommended in all herds.

**What do I gain by taking part in this program?**

By vaccinating your calves and backtagging your slaughter cattle you can assure the brucellosis-free status of your own herd and help recertify your county without additional ranch tests except in known infected herds. This will save you time and money, help to maintain your area's modified-certified status with less work, and contribute to eradication of the disease.

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